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GUENEVERE





# GUENEVERE

A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

By  
STARK YOUNG



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a. m. p. Jan 30, 1938

To

EDWARD JOHNSON

“longe quos simul a domo profectos  
diverse maria et viae reportant”

;



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

KING ARTHUR.

GUENEVERE, his wife.

SIR LAUNCELOT.

SIR GAWAIN

SIR MORDRED

SIR AGRAVAINE

SIR GARETH

} nephews to the king, and brothers.

SIR KAY, the seneschal.

DAGONET, the queen's page.

MORWENA, the abbess at Boscastle.

AGATHA, a sister.

LYONE LE BLANCHE

YGRAINE

ENID

} ladies to the queen.

TOR, COLGREVAUNCE, PELEAS, IDAWC, BORS, URI-  
ENS, MELIAGRAUNCE, CADOR, BREUSE, PERSAUNT,  
BLAMOR, URRE, knights of King Arthur's court;  
a woman; other minor persons.



# GUENEVERE

“Quanto la cosa è piú perfetta  
Piú senta il bene e così la doglienza.”

## ACT I

*A wood near Mordred's castle. A path runs across; on the right side the big rocks stand; on the left the ground is less broken. It is the first day of May, the wood is all green, and the wild flowers blooming. There is a sound of running water, and many birds sing in the trees.*

*Enter SIR MORDRED, SIR AGRAVAINE, and SIR GAWAIN.*

*Mordred*

Curse those little feathered devils, all  
The trees are full of them, singing as if  
The air were silver sweet with feast bells,  
And the world were sweet, and life sweet and free  
From hate.

*Gawain*

Come, come, my lord, let the birds alone, their notes  
Are sweet and limpid like the lives of simple  
Men in this world

*Mordred*

Aye, squeeze your stale morals from nature, brother,  
For every weather a mood. As if she had  
Not planted in our bloods the heaviness  
Of hate, as I do hate Sir Launcelot,  
And scorn the white-souled Arthur.

*Agravaine*

And I do hate this lusty knight.

*Gawain*

Brothers, brothers, stint your noise. Ye know  
And well that had Sir Launcelot not proved  
Himself in our behalf, we had been by now  
Full cold at the heart-root. He hath saved us all,  
And many a time, has wen —

*Agravaine*

Small matter that. He hath a joy in heat  
And struggle.

*Gawain*

Small matter very like, and men do hate  
The objects of their own ingratitude.

*Agravaine*

Daily and nightly he is with the queen.

*Gawain*

Ye know it not.

*Mordred*

Aye, do we. And the king is shamed —

*Gawain*

Nay, nay, spare that, you care not for Arthur, 'tis  
Some privy hate you bear the queen, or grudge  
Against Sir Launcelot.

*Mordred*

Tush! 'tis all prattle. Lend me your ear, good brother.  
Come, think you not in any of us three  
Were stuff for a king?

*Gawain*

Thou king? Said I not so? Shame, Mordred, shame!

*Agravaine*

Nay, nay, brother Mordred, 'tis the general cause  
That moves thee, 'member that, the general cause.

*Gawain*

Be not so busy, I pray you, for of this  
Will the whole realm be mischieved.

*Mordred*

Fall what may, what I have said I have said.



*Gawain*

That I believe, for thou hadst ever a tooth  
For all unhappiness.

*Mordred*

King Arthur hath consented to this plan  
To take the queen by force and lie in wait  
For Launcelot to rescue her.

*Gawain*

Take the queen, thou sayest?

*Agravaine*

Then some romantic hour to catch the two  
Together.

*Gawain*

Take the queen?

*Mordred*

Hist! here's two — the first is Idawc  
Of Cornwall; 'tis your poetical,  
Gapes-at-a-ballad cub — he'll be with us.  
And old Sir Kay, sour as curds. (*Enter Idawc and Sir*

*Kay*) How now

Fair lords? We speak of the widening reft betwixt  
The king and the queen, what think you?

*Kay*

'Tis a great tangle, this marriage knot.

*Gawain*

The king consents? To snare the queen?

*Mordred*

Consents, though we had nigh not brought him to it.  
He hath a deeming strong as ours, but shuns  
The outcome of such publishment of falseness  
In the heart of the realm. 'Tis a dreamer, and his world  
Peoples itself with airy shapes, and stretches  
Rapt vistas for his eye to travel in,  
Conversing with visions. They say he hath  
Small ear for the queen, but hourly weigheth him  
Some cloud-vast enterprise or famous venture,  
So that his kingdom is his spouse and not

The queen. To him she is fair womanhood,  
 The finer element within the scheme,  
 And not a woman. Therefore being human —

*Idawc*

True, dost thou —

*Kay*

True, most true. It is no king men see,  
 But is a mist.

*Idawc*

Dost thou remember once at harvest time —  
 'Twas at the dying twilight, and the moon,  
 Drowsily waking from the dusky east,  
 Did shed a glamorous vapour o'er the water.  
 Bargemen hither, thither ran to light  
 Their torches, music strummed, and on the bank  
 Thronged with embarkings for the river pageant —

*Agravaine*

Came what — well, what is't at the pageant? Here's  
 No time for fooling, youth.

*Idawc*

Why, on a barge sheathed all in golden samite,  
 We saw the white queen like fair summer wings  
 Upon a lotus flower. There apart  
 Stood Arthur musing, chin in hand, or gazed  
 On the stars, and sad dim space, as he would read  
 Their meaning. Lo! one said, "Seest not the queen  
 Upon yon barge, my lord?" Arthur turned  
 Where she did beckon him to look on her,  
 And said, "White hue on yellow, sure some sign,  
 Fair virtue thus surmounteth jealousy."  
 So killed all joyaunce with his moral carp.  
 But Launcelot beheld her as a vision,  
 And cried, all dazèd with her loveliness,  
 "God's life, thou'rt fairer than the heaven!"

*Kay*

Odds, by my beard, 'tis past my patience.  
 What woman cares to prate of attributes,

Of whys and wherefores and such moral twaddle?  
These axioms be poor pudding for their stomachs  
When they might hear men sing their beauty's praise —

*Idawc*

Fie, my lord!

*Kay*

Fie not. The king is blinded with star-dust,  
For once I ventured: "If thou thoughtest more  
Of this same fleshly world, my lord,  
'Twere better haply for thee and for it."  
Said I, "There's holiness as true, I wis,  
About the humblest, rushlit cottage door  
As at the Portal of the Starry Lamps.  
Men's souls need human fellowship to ripen  
Them for God, as many twigs do lift  
Higher the flame." Methought in that  
I was fair eloquent —

*Mordred*

And he — mark me it was some ponderable  
Stuff he spake —

*Kay*

He turned and said, "Here in this life the soul  
Is solitary and yearns ever toward  
The Solitary, the Great One beyond."  
Meaning somewhat I dare say, for he bent  
Upon me his wide-dreaming eye  
Till I was wildered with their steady burning.

*Mordred*

Come, 'tis no time now for remembrances.  
Soon come the knights to hear our plot. They will  
Lend hands, for ever trouble-brew draws men.  
From diverse causes —

*Gawain*

Aye, some like me for stubborn certainty  
Desire to prove at all costs what they know.

*Agravaine*

Be not too sure.

*Gawain*

For some men rather would be sure and die  
Than live in midst of doubtings. Ah how,  
How if this cause splits brothers thus, will all  
The court be rent!

*Mordred*

Some for gain —

*Gawain*

Aye, you will reward them, brother.

*Mordred*

I did not say so.

*Agravaine*

Leave wrangling, they are at hand.

*(Enter knights, Sir Bors, Sir Uriens, Sir Tor, and others.*

*All wear blank shields.)*

*Mordred*

Good morrow, fair knights! The time doth press, come,  
come,

Ring me round here, and let me speak our plan.  
Who here knows not the shame that flares at court,  
Open as day? Think not the king deceived;  
He hath a deeming, but he is full loth to speak,  
Seeing how oftentimes Sir Launcelot hath served  
The king and the queen and saved their worship.  
And if we take not Launcelot with the queen  
And make accusal, you know the accuser must  
Prove't on Sir Launcelot himself; the which  
No living wight hath yet done. But if  
We take him —

*Meliagraunce*

But, my lord, how may this be done?

*Mordred*

Peace, and I will tell you. This day  
Is the queen's maying, and even now she rides  
To woods and fields. With her come ten of the Queen's  
Knights,  
Who ride thus ever near to her, and joust

For her, and wear no manner of arms but hers.  
They shall be dressed in green and white, and go  
Gathering herbs and flowers to deck themselves  
For maying. There'll be songs —

*Meliagraunce*

Well?

*Mordred*

Well, I saw them start, and they shall come  
This way, and we will take them.

*(Confusion.)*

Nay, nay, stir not, nor mutter discontent,  
But hear me. We will take the queen and hers  
To my castle hard by, she will send in secret  
Unto Sir Launcelot and he will come.

*Meliagraunce*

Aye, he will come, mark you he will come!

*Mordred*

Aye, he will come. We'll seem to yield, then take  
Him later with the queen. The king himself shall  
see it.

*Agravaine*

Sir Launcelot will come to rescue her,  
The king shall be brought, and we shall catch our birds  
Together.

*Kay*

Here's Cador and Breuse linked arm in arm, and drunk  
As always. 'Tis strange they lack preferment  
At court. Now sure 'twill not be long for them,  
Such worthlessness could never fail to be  
Rewarded by the state. Sir Breuse hath bound  
A tavern garland on his brow, and look,  
Cador hath him a bread-cake for a shield.

*(Enter Cador and Breuse.)*

*Cador*

Steady, steady!

*Breuse*

Steady! We go to make a kingdom now.

*Cador*

Aye, we be statesmen, and 'twere well to walk  
Straight.

*Breuse*

'Tis a hard matter.

*Cador*

Keep hold on me, and 'twill be well.

*Kay*

Aye, that's politic. Ho! young sops,  
What is't in the air?

*Breuse*

'Tis a new king I scent, methinks.

*Mordred*

We have no time for them, come, come! Doubt not  
But we shall catch our birds together.

*Gawain*

Catch them together — how? Think you the queen  
Will bide an hour longer than need be  
In thy black walls?

*Mordred*

That I do. Sir Launcelot hath pained  
Himself too much already on her part,  
She will keep low to 'scape the scandal. That,  
Or we can hobble up her knights that they  
Will not depart so speedily. The queen  
Will not desert them methinks.

*Gawain*

Scandal!

*Mordred*

Aye, scandal, 'tis the eye of the matter.

*Cador*

Scandal, what is scandal?

*Kay*

'Tis piety with a bit of news to tell.  
A fair garland thou hast, my lord.

*Breuse*

To keep my memory green, belike.

*Kay*

The fruit of the vine is within, is't not? A gallant  
Shield hast thou, Cador. 'Twill keep off death.

*Cador*

Truly it may be.

*Breuse*

Nay, nay, eat not thy defence, brave lord. Stand up!

*Kay*

'Twere more avail to swallow thy spear, methinks.

'Twould help thee stand.

*Breuse*

Art thou the king, Sir Mordred, yet — yet?

*Mordred*

Silence, thou muddled fool. Not yet, nor ever!

*Breuse*

I went to say I could not worship thee.

I serve the fallen angel that the priest

Told me of, naming him not.

*Mordred*

Angel?

*Breuse*

Wine, 'tis a fallen angel.

*Knight*

Keen-carved, Sir Garland.

*Kay*

Sure one would listen at thine ear as at

A sea-shell for the empty roaring.

*Mordred*

'Tis no time for such chaffering. Get them aside,

Good Sir Kay, stop but their noise and I

Were much beholden to you.

*Kay*

'Twould merit somewhat. Come, ye princely wits,

Let me but tell my latest dream — 'twas that

A shower of wine will fall this Friday next —

*Cador*

Wine! Haste thee, Breuse, find one that hath a moat

To sell. Good Sir Kay, tell more!

*Kay*

Come then and I will satisfy you. (*They go to the left of the stage.*)

*Gawain*

My lords, let me speak.

*Agravaine*

Nay, hear him not, my lords, for he had rather  
Corruption bred and rotted at the court  
Than he should stir his sluggish feet in struggle.

*Knight*

Craven! Fie!

*Second Knight*

We'll hear Sir Gawain.

*Gries*

Sir Gawain! Sir Gawain! Fie! Craven! Sir Gawain!

*Gawain*

Hear me briefly. My lords, it is a grievous  
Thing to wreck a good man's fortune. God  
Will break the evil. Therefore have we no need  
To avenge the king. That Launcelot is false ye  
know

Not yet, but know if he be found so what  
Will fall on us. Shipwreck and storm and split —  
Arthur is king, but Launcelot hath lands,  
Hath bournes and territories of huge extent  
Here in this island, and doth own a realm  
In Fraunce, castles and followers. Let but  
Discord raise her head between them two,  
And this demesne of Britain will be rent  
In twain, racked and overwhelmed; the fellowship  
Of the King's Round Table broke, the noblest face  
And form of chivalry be felled and gutted  
In a civil strife. And if in truth —

*Agravaine*

Hurry, man, art thou old Nestor come  
Back from Hell, and windier than ever?



*Mordred*

True, brother. Come closer, Sir Knights, and ye  
Shall see the better justice of our plans. (*They with-  
draw to left.*)

*Kay (on the right)*

Calm thee, calm thee! Spare thy words. The world  
Hath deafened itself already with much speech.

*Breuse (mounts a rock)*

I'll be a king, have I not a crown?

*Kay*

But little in it.

*Cador*

Brains were not missed in a king, good sir. He is  
My friend.

*Breuse*

I will be an historical king, and marry  
Me three wives.

*Cador*

Nay, sweet friend, when thou art king, wed not.  
King married is not king, but the queen's husband.

*Breuse*

Weep not, thou mayst serve me.

*Kay*

Aye, listen yonder.

*Gawain*

If Launcelot doth then love the queen, hath he  
Not championed her more than the saintly Arthur?  
If still ye head on this I say I am  
Not with you, and depart.

*Bors*

Nor will I hear your tales, nor share your counsels.

*Blamor*

Nor I be traitor 'gainst the noblest knight  
In all the world.

*Mordred*

Wilt thou take hence that two?

*Gawain*

Glad were I. When they be sober they  
Will give me thanks.

*Kay*

Go, Cador, and thou Breuse, this man hath found  
A fishpond lately dried. 'Twill hold thy wine.

*Cador*

Come, come, good Sir. What is't to Friday? (*Exeunt  
Gawain, Breuse, Cador, Bors, and Blamor.*)

*Agravaine*

They are like some fishes, my lord, and dread the light.

*Kay*

Let Launcelot and the queen be caught.

*Knight*

Ho! Sir Kay, 'tis the cream, the cake of solid  
Sense.

*Mordred*

Silence, I pray you.

*Kay*

Have I not told the king to tread on Earth?  
Answer me that.

*Agravaine*

Yea, yea, greybeard.

*Kay*

Once Sir Launcelot changed mail with me  
And saved me at a venture. Odds, at my  
Best feasts they cannot eat for love. I had served  
Him for his courtesy — leave out the queen —  
And I had fed him fat as the Duke of Dutchmen.

*Agravaine*

Rattle your keys, Sir Kay, instead of your tongue,  
Your jams are sweeter than your words.

*Kay*

Sweeter for thy tongue haply; for it  
Hath tasted of more jam than of wise words.

*Tor*

The shame burns deep, the purging of the court

Will uplift all the realm and bring to bloom  
Again the chaste flower of the earlier days.

*Persaunt*

Nay, I dare swear my lady's purity. Be the truth  
As it may, shame unto a man that speaks  
Shamefully of a lady and a queen.

*Agravaine*

You wear fresh flowers, youth, but they will fade.

*Cries*

I am against this thing. Let it be tried. Cowards!  
And I!

*(Confusion, and taking of sides.)*

*Mordred*

Thus is the whole court rent to many minds,  
The venture is dangerous.

*Agravaine*

Nay, speak to them with that tongue of thine and they  
Will follow —

*Mordred*

Fair lords, young knights full of the noble fire  
Of youth, put up your swords, hear me!

*(Confusion.)*

*Knights*

Sir Mordred! Fie! Cowards! Sir Mordred!

*Mordred*

My lords, none of us would the queen took hurt  
From this we go to do. Think ye not so.  
The thing is this, doubt like a hidden mould  
Eats up the peace of the court — sure the thing  
Touches us all equally. Certain  
Evil would I rather choose than blank  
Uncertainty.

*Knight*

And after she is ta'en, my lord, what then?

*Mordred*

Then I will feign hot love for her, and threaten  
Masteries. Sir Launcelot will come

And we shall see what door the wind blows in.  
*(There is the sound of talk and laughter.)*

*Agravaine*

They come.

*Mordred*

'Tis too late but to prove the thing as planned.

*Persaunt*

Would I had kept out of this.

*Kay*

Too late for temperance after the lips are wet.

*(Exeunt all, hiding themselves behind rocks and trees to the left. Enter the queen with twelve knights and three ladies, all in green and white, wearing wreaths and bearing garlands of flowers.)*

*Guenevere*

But leave, good sirs, this hunting talk  
 Of falcons, jesses, leash and lure, there's love,  
 We have not spoke of that, and it is May.  
 Sing, my lord, one of the songs you learned  
 In your knave service at the court.

*Gareth*

'Tis but a kitchen song, my lady, sung  
 By humble wenches at ring-time.

*Guenevere*

Sir Knight, if thou wert armed, I'd send thee back  
 To bring me water in thy helmet all  
 This way, as penance for thy dulness.  
 Cannot the humblest woman sing her love,  
 My lord? Love maketh any woman as  
 A queen, I pray you sing.

*Gareth (sings)*

The white-thorn blossoms blow,  
 And sweet buttercups in the grass,  
 Go woo, my lad, go wooing!  
 In winter frosts the blood is slow,  
 But lusty May makes every lass  
 Come smiling to your wooing.

Weave marigolds within your hair,  
Go woo, my lad, go wooing,  
For spring makes all the lasses fair  
And ready for your wooing!

*Guenevere*

'Tis a fair chaunt. Sweet season hath ever sweet song.  
Lo! there a little woodland pool, rimmed round  
With crocuses, and tangled water-flags,  
Here shepherd's purse and vetch and meadow-sweet —  
See how the blue sky lieth in it — come —  
And now a cloud sails by. This is the time  
When maids may learn what manner of fortune waiteth  
Them, and who their knights haply may be.  
Therefore Lyone and Enid and Ygraine,  
Bide with me here. And ye, Sir Knights, shall leave  
Us and go on a little space ahead,  
And one by one each maid shall search the pond  
For her fate's image.

*Lyone*

Thou too wilt read thy glass, wilt thou not, my lady?

*Guenevere*

Nay, nay, I am an aged dame, and all  
My ships are in already. Seest thou not  
The furrows in my picture there?

*Lyone*

'Tis but the ripple from the rushes breaks  
Thy feature, else 'twere fair as the flowers mirrored  
Near the marge.

*Guenevere*

Ah, flatter me not, child, 'tis youth alone  
Hath still its bright sails growing on the horizon's  
Verge, flocking like gulls, the crafts of hope.  
Now do ye listen to this play of fortunes.  
Sir Knights, ye shall go on, nor dare look back,  
And when that ye are gone, one of these maids —  
But ye must know not which — shall watch her here  
In the water for her true love's face to look

Over her shoulder. Meanwhile ye shall  
 Draw lots to find which knight returns. 'Tis he,  
 By the faith of this blue pond, shall be her lord.

*Gareth*

Go now, my lady?

*Guenevere*

Yea, but go not too far. And he that wins,  
 If he be wise, will hasten back

To meet the fair eyes laughing in the pool

*(Exeunt knights to left.)*

I will take me three petals thus and tear

In one a rent — thou seest — and ye shall choose

One each, and she that holdeth the torn leaf —

Wit ye 'tis the pierced heart — 'tis she shall watch

First in the pool. Choose quickly. *(They choose.)*

Ah, Lyone le Blanche, my lily maid,

'Tis thou; then kneel thee here, one comes.

Child, thy fair hair mingles its pale gold with the  
 crocus

Flowers, and is as fair as they. Hist!

*(Enter Sir Colgrevaunce. He comes and looks in the  
 pool.)*

*Lylene*

Sir Colgrevaunce!

*Colgrevaunce*

Lylene!

*Guenevere*

Fie, fie, Lyone, thy cheeks are flame, and thine,

Sir Knight!

*Colgrevaunce*

'Tis but the stooping.

*Guenevere*

Ah nay, now I do swear these eyes have met

For love ere this. 'Tis a pretty jest to bribe

Beforehand Mother Fortune thus. Ye shall plight

Your troth with rush-rings from this friendly bank.

Go now, my lord, send others to assay.

*Colgrevaunce*

God send another such good grace as mine.

*Guenevere*

Now, Enid and Ygraine, choose ye from these

Two petals, as but now ye chose. Who has't?

'Tis thou, Ygraine? Then kneel. (*Ygraine kneels.*)

*Ygraine*

Ah, Jesu, keep me, my lady, some reptile stirs

The slime beneath and muddies the whole pool.

'Tis an ill omen, I will not read my lot

To-day. (*Rises.*)

*Enid*

Nor I. See, all is foul, 'tis an ill omen.

*Guenevere*

Think you? I will not say these signs are true

Or false, seeing we know not what be hid

From the eye of man. Yet I like it not.

*Ygraine*

Still it muddies, I will not look!

*Guenevere*

Then let us leave it and go on. (*They start out to the left.*)

*Enid*

What noise was that, the sound of bosses clanking

On armed heel?

(*Enter Mordred and the knights. The latter have their visors down.*)

*Mordred*

Good morrow, madam.

*Guenevere*

My lord, you know this is the first of May,

When men's souls like the white clouds float in dreams.

What means this froward battlement of steel

At such a time? Out of my way, I like it not.

(*The Queen's Knights have come up on the left; commotion off the stage in that direction.*)

*Guenevere*

Hold yet, my knights, 'tis useless, ye have no shields.  
If my lord Arthur or Sir Launcelot  
They, if they were here, would teach thee how  
To budge, thou caitiff Mordred.

*Mordred*

Aye, but our lord Arthur is not here,  
Nor thy Sir Launcelot. If either were,  
Who knows what he would do? So I will speak.

*Guenevere*

Speak then and go.

*Mordred*

Hear then and stay. 'Tis long that I have loved thee,  
And passing well, and have long eyed my time.  
This day I have thee, and thou leavst me not  
Till thou dost love with me, or I and all  
These my men-at-arms be dead. Come  
To my castle near, come willingly, for come  
Thou shalt, whether thou wilt or no.

*Guenevere*

Hast spoken?

*Mordred*

Aye, madame, for the nonce.

*Guenevere*

Then this is my answer. Your love and you I spurn  
Out of my path like offal. Know, Sir Mordred,  
I had liefer cut my throat in twain  
Than love with you. Who these be, for there  
Are knights among your menials here, what men  
Of my lord's these be, that lend their hands to you  
And do preserve this vile incognito,  
I know not, but *what* they be I know,  
Vile dust to which your spittle gives a mould  
And shape, without it, formless atoms.

*Mordred*

Slow, madam, slow, your hot words cannot sink  
In my cold ears.



*(Off the stage to the left, the Queen's Knights break nearer through the ranks of Mordred's men.)*

*Colgrevaunce*

Ho, we come, my lady!

*Mordred*

Back, puppets.

*Gareth*

Way there, cowards!

*Guenevere*

Nay, nay, ye are not armed!

*Pelcas*

Whether we die or not we care not, so

We keep thee safe.

*Colgrevaunce*

We care not! On, on!

*(Confusion increases off the stage to the left.)*

*Guenevere (aside to Dagonet)*

Go boy, go Dagonet, go, take this ring,

Watch thy chance and go. Give to Sir Launcelot

This ring, and pray if he would ever see

My face again, to come and succour me

From shame. Go, spare not thyself!

*Lyonc*

O Jesu in heaven, help thy knights!

*Guenevere*

Stay, stay your blows!

*Mordred*

Stay your blows.

*Persaunt*

Stay your blows, fools!

*Guenevere*

The most valiant are as chaff before armed baseness.

And this I know, good men have naught to fear

Save only cowards. Therefore, Sir Mordred, slay not

My knights. I will go with you if you hurt

Them not, and bring them to my prison,

For I will slay myself if they be not

In presence while I am with you.

*Mordred*

For your sake, madam, it shall be done. But where  
Is Dagonet, the page? Nay, madam, you  
Have played me false. Give the boy chase, you two,  
(*Aside*) But do not stop him. Let there be litters  
Made, and bring these wounded after us.

(*The queen and her ladies go out with Sir Mordred and  
his party. The wounded knights are borne on litters  
made from the shields and spears. Sir Agravaine  
remains. Enter Sir Kay.*)

*Kay*

Come you not with us, my lord? We wait.

*Agravaine*

No, I will bide if haply the page returns here.

*Kay*

How will it end? Think you Sir Launcelot  
Will come?

*Agravaine*

Think you 'twill ever rain again?

*Kay*

There'll be wild deeds to follow this day's work,  
Sure man's devilry doth pass the devil;  
And thy brother hath outdevilled Hell. I'll no  
More o't, but get me home.

*Agravaine*

Go plan a feast, 'tis suited to thy wits  
Some better than these plotted policies.

*Kay*

Belike 'twere better for thee too. The realm  
Were safer then. And sure thy brains and belly  
Are all one. (*Exit Kay.*)

*Agravaine*

Sour but sharp likewise. 'Tis no noodle head.  
(*Enter Dagonet running.*)

*Dagonet*

Gone, oh, my lady!

*Agravaine*

Stop your whimpers, cub, have you found him?  
Speak, fool!

*Dagonet*

Yea, my lord, at the edge of the wood, he had  
Already got word of mischief to the queen.  
And hither gat him armed.

*Agravaine*

He comes?

*Dagonet*

Close behind, my lord, there! there's his breastplate  
Flashed through the trees — there! my lord.

*Agravaine*

Ha, ha, the broth thickens, come, come, shag-head.

*Dagonet*

There, my lord!

*(To the right is heard the sound of a galloping horse.)*

## ACT II

*A day later. One of the chambers in Sir Mordred's castle. The wounded knights lie in the adjoining room to the left. On the right is a window with bars. A flight of steps outside leads up to the door at the back. The room has a canopied bed, tapestries, and armorial ornaments. Below is the sound of hammering. Dagonet sits by the window. Sir Colgrevaunce stands by the window.*

*Colgrevaunce*

Dagonet, what means that knocking?

*Dagonet*

They mend what wreck Sir Launcelot wrought.

*Colgrevaunce*

On yesterday?

*Dagonet*

Yesterday, my lord, when he came here

To succour my lady. In he rode and smote  
 Thrice with his spear, and the hinges groaned.  
 And he smote down the door, and stoutly thrang  
 Amid the press, hewing about from right  
 To left, until Sir Mordred came and yielded  
 Him in terror, and granted the queen's release.

*Colgrevaunce*

You saw it, boy?

*Dagonet*

Yea, did I. Some day may Jesu grant  
 That I may be a man, even such a knight  
 As our Sir Launcelot, and serve some lady  
 Like the queen.

*Colgrevaunce*

The lad dreams. Right, thou art in the orient  
 Of life, and at that hour the daylight's hue  
 Is golden.

*Dagonet*

I do not know all thou sayst, my lord.

*Colgrevaunce*

But why lingers the queen here? To still  
 The shame maybe. Let her then tell,  
 She cometh now?

*Dagonet*

Not yet, my lord.

*Colgrevaunce*

Haply she will tell us when she comes.  
 Hither, boy, and tell us more of this  
 Late prowess of Sir Launcelot's. Shut to  
 The door, the wind from yonder casement blows  
 Too much over the floor here.

*(Exeunt Dagonet and Sir Colgrevaunce. Enter Sir Mordred. He makes a circuit of the room, and examines the bars of the window.)*

*Mordred*

I'll seem to hesitate. 'Twill make him like  
 A goaded horse by mad leaps lead himself

To mishap — there's jealous prying for you.  
Yea, my lord, the chamber is vacant, come.  
Too fast intent to hear. 'Tis sport to watch  
This greatness with its single view and aim,  
And keen half-sight, steer for its end, all blind  
To the rest. My lord, 'tis vacant here. Come!  
(*Enter King Arthur.*)

The queen is in the courtyard with the hounds  
And falcons, the birds' flight seems to charm her.

*Arthur*

'Tis fair without, and yet methinks the air  
Hath lost the nipping flame that spurs the blood.  
'Tis stale and heavy. I like not the red  
Streak in the west, nor the dun mound over it.  
Knows naught, poor wretch, of what draws over  
her.

'Tis a poor, weary, foolish world where we  
Blow in like wind, ruled by dark outer forces,  
That floods the hollows and low places here  
On our globe, and lo! is gone again.

*Mordred*

Nay, nay, my lord, naught ever came of dreaming.

*Arthur*

Sir Mordred I repent that ever I  
Did lend mine ear to this. A grievous hurt  
To me and mine will fall of it if she  
Be false. If she is not, then all this shame  
Were undeserved of her.

*Mordred*

Then give it up, my lord.

*Arthur*

Nay, we have gone too far now to draw back,  
Yet I do repent me. You were  
Too forward in it.

*Mordred*

It was not I, my lord, but those behind  
That pushed me on as kinsman to yourself,

Saying the court reeked with the stench of the queen's  
falseness.

*Arthur*

There's foulness in thy words, I like it not.

*Mordred*

'Twere best forgotten all. Why should we credit  
Vile slander. Thou knowest —

*Arthur*

I had some warning of this same thing once  
From Merlin, the wizard, long before I took  
The daughter of Leodograunce to wife.  
But when I saw her I did heed him not.  
Still, whether she be false or true, I will  
Not swear. To me she hath been ever fair  
And gentle, and to my knights and to all ladies,  
A queen among women and a woman among  
Queens. And that Sir Launcelot loves her  
I dare say. He hath succoured her from danger,  
As when —

*Mordred*

But she, my lord, loves she him?

*Arthur*

Whether she loveth him I will not say —

*Mordred*

Thou wilt not say. Men say that thou striv'st not  
For certainty, loving the peace of thy court  
More than thy wife and honour.

*Arthur*

Thou holdest well the evil said of me.  
Whether she loveth him or not I will  
Not say. God hath given him fair seemliness  
Of form, and hardiness to work so largely  
That he hath had always the better in combat.  
And she hath a heart passionate and wild,  
But yet her soul beats high —

*Mordred*

Nathless ere this have men said that they took

Long draughts of love together.

*Arthur*

Her lofty soul yearns toward the heights, she fain  
Would keep the purity of the court,  
And love Sir Launcelot as soul loves soul,  
But then her eye takes fire at sight of him,  
Her veins surge hot with the glory, colour, pomp,  
And beauty of this world, — the mortal strife  
'Twixt flesh and spirit, which hath won I know not.

*Mordred*

My lord, I speak, methinks, as should become  
Your nephew, and I am but an unwilling  
Mouthpiece of mine ears.

*Arthur*

It is an old lie.

*Mordred*

Yea, my lord, an old lie, and I  
Do doubt it altogether.

*Arthur*

It is a lie.

*Mordred*

Yet there be whispers in the court.

*Arthur*

And 'twould be well to prove it false.  
What whispers?

*Mordred*

About Sir Launcelot and the queen, my lord.  
Men say that when Sir Launcelot departs,  
She in her secret bosom writhes and welters  
Like a mad woman, though she give no sign  
Outwardly to men.

*Arthur*

She is the queen.

*Mordred*

Aye, my lord, and bears it with a proud  
Countenance, as though she felt no fears  
Of her love, nor scented her own peril.

*Arthur*

She is the queen.

*Mordred*

Only last night, but 'tis a lie —

*Arthur*

What is a lie?

*Mordred*

My lord, it is a lie I blush to tell.

Some caitiff swore Sir Launcelot to have come

Here to the queen, even last night.

*Arthur*

Came here? God's life!

*Mordred*

Be calm, my lord, my men slept 'fore the door.

He could not enter there, nor by yon threshold

Where the knights sleep. There is no place

Save the window here and that is barred.

And —

*Arthur*

Why did you start, when your hand touched the bar?

*Mordred*

Did I start, my lord?

*Arthur*

Aye, and broke off your speech. Why do you hold

The bar as if you fear to fall?

*Mordred*

Hold the bar, my lord?

*Arthur*

You trifle with me, dog, playing parrot thus!

*Mordred*

Put up your sword, wild man. I would save you

Even at this last moment. Some hand

Hath torn the bar out of its place, and all

Its fellows likewise have been set loosely

In notch again.

*Arthur*

My brain scorches. Let me but wait with thee,



Good Mordred, till the end.

*Mordred*

Come, we cannot wait here.

*(Mordred takes down the torch. Excunt. The chamber is dark.)*

*(The door from the knights' chamber opens, and the light streams into the room. Guenevere stands at the door. Lyone, Enid, and Ygraine are with her. Dagonet carries a lighted lamp and a torch. The ladies have their lamps still unlit. Sir Colgrevaunce follows them in, and stands near the door.)*

*Colgrevaunce*

My lady, I do speak for them that here  
Lie weary past all standing with their wounds.  
We ask why stayest thou here within these walls?  
They slime with falseness.

*Guenevere*

Well may you know that 'tis not any love  
For this foul place that keeps me here, 'tis dread  
Lest word of this should come to the king and new  
Strife rise, now through me. This poor realm is  
Already like to flame a holocaust  
From courtly feuds and smouldering ashes, dull  
And waiting to be stirred, kindred hates  
And new-old grudges. Pray God none come  
By me. Therefore when you are come with me  
To Camelot and the court, speak not of this  
Black, treacherous deed, but 'scape the noise and scandal.  
Three days let us bide here as if we came  
By chance into this castle of Sir Mordred's,  
Where entertainment proffered pleased us so  
That we must needs remain to bask in it.  
Meantime the hours will pass —

*Knight (in chamber to the left)*

Nay, we shall be shamed, they are traitors all.

*Colgrevaunce*

Nay, the queen hath judged aright, 'tis well.

Let Mordred sour now, uneasy, crafty,  
Brewing discontent, better this cloak  
To hide his guilt than some new war in Britain.

*Guenevere*

Here too my knights lie wounded in my cause,  
Think you I will forsake them thus? Not so,  
But I will take them with me hence to-morrow  
If they be strong enough. If not I bide.

*Knight (in chamber)*

'Tis half the world's mishap lies in that word  
To-morrow.

*Guenevere*

Ye lack nothing, fair knights? Then sweet sleep  
Visit your eyelids all the night long. God  
Gave sleep for brave men.

*Knights (in room)*

Jesu keep thee, my lady.

*Colgrevaunce*

They are already half asleep, my lady,  
And my brain muddles strangely since I supped.  
Here within is the tankard we drank from —  
It was a sleepy draught. Think you 'twas drugged?

*Guenevere*

I know not. Wherefore?

*Colgrevaunce*

Mine eyes are lead — aye me, my heart is heavier  
With some foreboding. 'Tis foolish surely,  
But I do feel that if I sleep I shall  
Not waken.

*Guenevere*

'Tis but the wound in thy arm. Set down the cup.  
Good night.

*Colgrevaunce*

Good night. God keep thee, my lady, good night.  
(*Exit.*)

*Guenevere*

'Tis a strange drowsiness, would God I had it.

*Lyone*

I have it not either.

*Guenevere*

Ygraine and Enid, ye have wearied much  
This day, and thirst for the sweet mead of dreams  
In the cup of sleep. Lyone le Blanche, my fair  
Lyone, thy head hath need of resting-place,  
Though thou know'st it not. For love in the heart  
beguileth

Like the sea-air.

*Lyone*

Nay, madam —

*Guenevere*

Ah, tell me not, have I not loved? Now do  
Thou kiss me here on my brow, for I have strange  
Shadows on my soul to-night, and I  
Have need of woman's love. Wherefore I know not,  
But my heart is sad.  
(*The three ladies light their lamps at hers, and kiss her  
forehead as they go out.*)

*Enid*

Good night, and a long sweet sleep to thee.

*Ygraine*

Good night, and the honey of dreams to thee, my lady.

*Lyone*

Nay, I protest, though I do love  
I fain would stay with thee, my lady. I have  
No need of sleep.

*Guenevere*

Ah, nay, go to thy pillow, child. There, there,  
I kiss dear rest upon thy brow. Do I  
Not know, have I not loved? (*Exit Lyone.*)  
God, have I not loved!

*Dagonet*

What hast thou done, my lady?

*Guenevere*

'Tis nothing. Smother those sconces, Dagonet.

(*He puts out torches by the window.*)

*Dagonet*

How beautiful thou art, my lady, thou  
Art like the meadows.

*Guenevere*

Like the meadows — how, child?

*Dagonet*

Why, now 'tis summer in the meadows, so  
For thee it is the summer of thy beauty.  
Beauty hath her seasons like the air,  
Hath she not, my lady?

*Guenevere*

Haply.

*Dagonet*

Her spring and summer and autumn —

*Guenevere*

And winter. True, very true! Boy, canst thou sing?

*Dagonet*

'Twill be sung badly, for I am not gay  
To-night. Art thou too sad, my lady, yea,  
Thou'st said it. Last night I could not sleep,  
And while I tossed in wakefulness I heard  
Knights clatter in their sleep; one leapt out  
Of bed, one dreamed he grasped a naked sword.  
It bodes no good, my lady. And this eve  
At dusk I saw big knights in the outer courtyard  
Polishing their mail, and all the squires  
Busily set. What doth it mean, my lady?  
It bodes no good.

*Guenevere*

Ask me not, boy. Take down thy harp  
And sing. Not loudly, 'tis late. Rouse not  
The happy, happy souls that can lie down  
And sleep. (*Aside.*) If I were with him always, were  
It well? Nay, passion feedeth on itself,  
'Tis mastery of self that bringeth water  
For the old stain.

*Dagonet (by the window, sings)*

Look out, my lady fair, and see  
The lustre of the night,  
The moon beneath her canopy  
Sails beauteous and bright,  
The hawthorn bough swings to and fro,  
The nightingale sings low, sings low,  
Look out, my lady fair!

Look out, my lady fair, —

Some cloud eats up the moon, I cannot sing.  
See how the shadows grow, and now the wind  
Gins rise. Dost hearken?

*Guenevere*

'Thou'rt fanciful. Stir some low murmuring sound  
Among thy strings, to bear thy song to me  
Like distant burthen on an evening wind.  
'Tis well — now come the gentle syllables  
Slipping like pearls upon the lovely thread.

*Dagonet (sings)*

Lean out, my lady fair, and hear  
The twitter of my lute that wings  
My heart to thee —

Madam, I hear noises 'neath the window,  
Rattle of pebbles and scratching 'gainst the walls.

*Guenevere*

It was some bed-sore knight in yonder room  
Turning to rest him. Thou art sleepy, go,  
Nay, go, good night.

*Dagonet*

God keep thee well, and make thee a good night,  
My lady.

*(Exit Dagonet. Guenevere draws the bolt after him, and fastens other door.)*

*(Enter Sir Launcelot at the window.)*

*Launcelot*

On yesternight to show my love for thee  
I tore out of their sockets these iron bones,  
Strove with might to show my love.

*Guenevere*

Ah, my beloved, I have set thee as  
A seal upon my heart, as a signet ring  
Upon mine heart have I set thee.  
But yet, Sir Launcelot, my blood is heavy  
With misgiving.

*Launcelot*

And mine. I know not wherefore I am racked  
With dread. But now I did see black shapes hurtle  
Thick upon the gust; the wind doth reek  
With pests and fevers, rank and rotten fogs  
Come from the sloughs. This stinking of the air  
Liketh me not. The stars are stubborn, all  
This darkness here is much too thick.

*Guenevere.*

'Tis so. But now the moon shined clear, now she  
Is gone. The morbid air doth suck up humours  
From the glens, a death-sweet perfume that  
But half doth please me. The heaven is silent,  
And round the world the mantle of the dusk  
Cloaks heavily. What noise was that?

*Launcelot*

It was the clock at the postern gate that smote.

*Guenevere*

What hour, didst thou take count?

*Launcelot*

Eleven, my lady.

*Guenevere*

Think you it a lucky hour?

*Launcelot*

Nay, I know not, but I —

*Guenevere*

My lord Sir Launcelot, it was a hapless

Hour that ever we twain met together.  
I 'member me the day thou first didst come  
To Camelot and the jousts. Ah, we were young —

*Launcelot*

And I did lack my sword and would have been shamed  
Hadst thou not brought it to me wrapped in thy robe.

*Guenevere*

And I did see thee fight so strong and seemly.

*Launcelot*

And I saw thee, Queen Guenevere, saw thee,  
Fairest among all women and all queens.  
And then as the rising moon looms like a white  
Fire from the world's edge, flaming into heaven,  
So burned up love through all my veins.

*Guenevere*

And as the streams of Araby do nurse  
The myrtle flower, and the wind and the rain lead up  
Till it bursts with prisoned sweetness, so hath love  
Opened my heart. And yet to-night have I  
Fears lest no good will come of it.  
How often have we made our promises,  
Made prayers to the cross that never more we fall  
In deadly sin — Alas, Sir Launcelot,  
An 'twere not for this earthly taint, thou hadst  
Succeeded in the quest.

*(The sound of wind and distant thunder without.)*

*Launcelot*

Yea, madam, I had seen the Sangreal  
But for this stain to blot it from mine eyes.  
Once I saw a great clearness in a chamber,  
And in the midst a silver table held,  
Covered with red samite from my sight,  
The cup that bore the blessed blood of God,  
With many angels singing nigh. And then  
The holy vessel of the Sangreal passed,  
And the fire smote me in the visage that  
I might not see, but only stand, my poor

Eyes hungering, my nostrils filled with the sweet  
Savour round. For never did I battle  
For God's sake, but only to win worship  
Or be better loved of thee.

*Guenevere*

Many a night —

(*Thunder. Guenevere goes to the window.*)

The aspect of the heavens groweth perilous.

*Launcelot*

How sweet is hearth and fellowship on such  
A night. Together —

*Guenevere*

Aye, frightened children cowering with dread.  
Hark to the bellowing elements! Methinks  
'Tis all the wrath of the world met here to-night.  
Look how the wind heaves darkness past the window!

*Launcelot*

Come from the lightning's reach. 'Tis well. What was't?  
Many a night, thou saidst?

*Guenevere*

Many a night, Sir Launcelot, have I  
Lain in the castle of silence, when, slowly  
Dropping dew-like round the eaves of sleep,  
Came dreams and separate lives. And then I saw  
That other life our younger visions painted.  
Ah, one soul liveth many lives, my lord,  
During our days' short span. Without this taint  
The purity of the court were still unbroke,  
And still unmarred were chivalry and worship.  
But from our love I fear me there will come  
Downfall and woe to many.

*Launcelot*

Grieve not thus o'ermuch. Dost not know well  
God pardoneth all things sooner than despair?

*Guenevere*

Methought there must be holiness somehow  
When soul drinketh up soul for love. Somehow —



But since it may not be, we needs must grieve  
And make but mournful cheer.

*Launcelot*

Not so, for all the quest and hoped-for heaven!  
Surely God wearies of repentant wretches,  
And the prostrate flesh of wailing men cumbers  
The path of the world too much already.

Let me stand up till I be dead, I cry,  
And if I sin I have eternity  
To bide the punishment. I loved thee, thou  
Art near me —

*Guenevere*

Beware! Thou dost o'erleap thyself, as ever  
At the moment's heat. Yet I do love thee sure  
No whit less that thou canst forget nice counsel  
In fond madness. Reason speaks to reason  
But unto heart only the heart can speak.

*Launcelot*

Heart calleth heart.

*Guenevere*

[But who knows not man's heart is but Fate's tool.]  
And somewhere in the depths of space our separate  
Fates call to each other through the void,  
And draw them near.

*Launcelot*

Let us not reck of Fate!

*Guenevere*

And life sweeps by us like a wind of flame,  
While we do wait unseeing in the caverns  
Of Fate, like blind things in the sea-caves.

*Launcelot*

Alas, why looms the shade of Fate thus on thee?

*Guenevere*

I heard strange stories long ago amid  
The leaping shadows of my father's hearth  
And sea-howls echoed from the haunted crags,  
And oft the dreaded of my Danish forebears,

Wyrd, great goddess of Fate, hath loomed on me,  
 Hath beckoned out of her marble mist, O Christ,  
 And I draw on but cannot read her face.  
 And 'yond her sitteth Darkness in the road.  
 O God, if Fate be in thy hand, let her  
 Not come upon me yet!

*Launcelot*

Nay, nay, thou art o'erwrought — who knows but I  
 May drive Fate back from thee with might of love?  
 Man's will is half his destiny.

*Guenevere*

She hath loved long the nations of the North,  
 Sea-king and thane, how 'if she wait their daughter?  
 How if e'en now she smote me from the sun?

*Launcelot*

Thou'rt rap!

*Guenevere*

Lo, at the window there, 'tis she!

*Launcelot*

'Tis what?

*Guenevere*

Wyrd! 'Tis Fate! See you not her face  
 There in the blackness? Do I not know thy face,  
 Thou Hell-Queen? Now do I learn its feature!  
 Spare me, O Christ, Christ may not spare me from  
 thee!

*Launcelot*

'Tis frenzy come upon thee!

*(Clamour without. Gauntlet strikes door.)*

Nay, Thou'st said it!

*(Thunder and wind. Flashes of lightning.)*

*Voices (without.)*

Ah, traitor knight, we have thee! Come out! Open  
 to us! Ho!

*Launcelot*

Madam, is there any armour here that I  
 May cover my body 'gainst their numbers?

*Guenevere*

Alas, none, no armour here!

*(Knocking and cries again.)*

*Launcelot*

O God, this shameful cry I may not suffer.

Most noble Christian queen, if I am slain, good night,  
And pray for my soul. Know well my kinsmen — they  
Will save thee from the fire.

*Guenevere*

Nay, wit thou well, Sir Launcelot, if thou  
Art slain, I will take my death meekly as ever  
Did any woman.

*(Knocking. Cries. Sir Launcelot gets a bolt from the  
window. They are battering at the door with a beam.)*

*Launcelot*

Leave your dashing, cowards, and I will set  
Open the door.

*Mordred's Voice*

As well ye may, traitor, for there be men  
Here against all odds.

*Voices*

Eight! Twelve! Score!

*Guenevere*

Nay, have I not my knights? 'Tis strange they  
Stir not at such clamour.

*(She opens the door to their chamber.)*

*Launcelot*

'Tis no matter.

*Guenevere*

Sir Colgrevaunce! Sir Gareth! Ho! Wake, wake!

They wake not, O God, they wake not,

'Twas the tankard! Oh, treachery!

*(Sir Launcelot opens the door wide enough to admit one  
man. A big knight pushes in. Sir Launcelot fells  
him with the bolt, draws him in, and fastens the door.)*

*Launcelot*

Off with his armour, help, madam! Do thou

Dash out the torches here when I am gone.

*(Outside there is an astonished silence. Hammering and cries again. Sir Launcelot, now armed, opens the door and rushes into their midst. They fight on the stair and in the corridor. Guenevere has put out the torches. Darkness broken only by flashes of lightning. Mordred rushes terrified into the room, followed by Agravaine, whose helmet is broken off. They are revealed by a flash.)*

*Guenevere*

Ah, God, Sir Mordred!

*(He is unbolting the door to the knights' chamber. She snatches the great tankard from the floor and hurls it.)*

Coward, have that for thee!

*(Lightning. Mordred has escaped. Agravaine lies on the floor.)*

Dark! O God, dark! Oh, alas!

Who is it there that draweth nearer me?

Hell, is it thou revisitest me once more

To-night? Nay, it hath armour! Speak!

No armour but a mantle, speak, oh speak!

Thou wilt not speak — I know thee! Oh, oh, oh!

*(Enter Sir Launcelot with torch. He places torch in sconce by door.)*

*Launcelot*

What woe is this? Thy cry hath roused the very  
Falcons in the mews.

*Guenevere*

One touched me in the darkness! I am mad!

'Tis naught. Art thou hurt?

*Launcelot*

Nay, but do faint with dealing blows. Calm thee,  
Calm thee! Thou shalt not come to harm. Hear  
The wind moan!

*Guenevere*

How if the king knows not what hath befallen?

'Twere fond to think they would not tell him.

But he is just and blind — and yet 'twas Fate  
That came but now to my window.

*(Footsteps without.)*

*Launcelot*

Some knight returns to —

*(King Arthur stands in the doorway.)*

*Guenevere*

Jesu Mari, it is —!

### ACT III

*The throne-end of the council-hall. The throne at the back to the right is under a blue canopy, spangled with gold, the whole elevated on a dais. To the left are arched doorways leading to the courts. Bells are ringing. Two knights on guard.*

*First Knight*

'Tis the third bell for the court.

*Second Knight*

Aye, the trial of the queen hath caused delay

In opening the tribunal.

*(Enter Sir Kay.)*

*First Knight*

The queen will be tried, then, this day. What hast  
Thou heard in the matter, Sir Kay?

*Kay*

Ask me not. Are mine ears then carrion dumps?

*Second Knight*

Much both false and true, methinks. Men say  
The queen would fain stay at the court, holding  
Her present station. There are two ways open: one  
To bide here as queen, the other to depart —

*First Knight*

With Launcelot to Joyous Garde?

*Second Knight*

Aye, with Launcelot.

*First Knight*

Then she is traitress to the king, sayest thou?

*Second Knight*

Men say it.

*First Knight*

And the king?

*Second Knight*

This treason hath power to stir a sea that tops  
The very promontories of men's souls.

*First Knight*

Life were not dearer than her station. 'Twere  
Better she be dead than queen no longer.

*Second Knight*

Few there be that will arm to speed the queen's death.

*First Knight*

Few. Not I.

*Second Knight*

'Tis a dark hour.

*Kay*

Carp, carp! What then, what would ye have? Wrong  
Or right, the queen hath courted hazards, wooed  
Mishaps. Can one head think for the world? Once  
I said to her: "Look, madam, look to your road!  
Whatever your thoughts be of wrong or right,  
The world goes on its destined pace, and where  
You err 'tis you that fall. And men sing on  
Though your poor ears be stopped with death."

*Second Knight*

Forgotten of men, that were the tragedy  
Of death methinks.

*First Knight*

All may not be so wise as thou, Sir Kay.

*Kay*

All do not try.

*Second Knight*

I have spoke more of question than of what  
Mine ears have gleaned about this buzzing court.

Mark you, Sir Knights, mark you, and mark you well,

Mark you the queen will be forgot in the bloody  
Strife that follows on this day. I have  
An inkling of Sir Mordred's schemes. Mark you,  
The queen will be forgot. First Sir Mordred  
Strips Sir Launcelot's forces from the king,  
Then he revolts. His eyes are green long since.

*First Knight*

True. There is wind of it very like. 'Tis through  
The queen he strikes the king. Were she not here  
He'd find another way.

*Second Knight*

Guenevere had eyes that saw ere this, wherefore  
Hath she been blind and sightless in this treachery?

*First Knight*

She hath a sorrow of her own, poor lady,  
Bleak winter yelling round her troublous heart.

*Second Knight*

They say the queen is contrite.

*First Knight*

I know not if her mood be so, my lord.  
She seemeth as one grieving for the end  
Her deed hath wrought, but holds not shame nor sor-  
row

For the deed, feeling that heaven in some deep way  
Doth justify this love and madness.

*Second Knight*

I understand not such things, but I know  
That men may do these things, but women never.

*Kay*

Faugh! 'tis rubbish. Thus my cook will say  
"Bread must be so, and cake be thus, or they  
Will never rise." I tell thee 'tis all rubbish.  
Leaven is leaven, and fire, fire! And men  
And women burn and rise and fall, as bread  
And cake, alike. 'Tis rubbish but 'tis men's

Philosophy, I look not there for sense.

*Second Knight*

Here comes Sir Launcelot, and his kin with him  
Stepping with his steps.

(*Enter Sir Launcelot, Sir Bors, Sir Lionel, Sir Urre, and others.*)

*Bors*

All your kindred and their followers  
Do stand without, ready and armed  
If there be need. We drank your wine with you  
When fortune ran it, and now we will drink water.  
Your will is ours —

*Launcelot*

Most noble kinsmen, I am much beholden  
To you. Give me your counsel, for if ever  
Man needed it, 'tis I at this time.

*Bors.*

My lord, this calm of thine is well —

*Launcelot*

'Twas spoken idly — what is counsel now?  
Who thinketh I will let harm light on her  
Doth know me not. No red drop brims at my  
Heart's fountain but doth run for her.

*Urre*

And we are strong —

*Launcelot*

My sword hath rived in twain men's flesh ere this!  
For every sorrow laid on her I will  
Set wells of blood running in this vile court,  
And many filthy, lying mouths will set  
To eating up their ordure! Spread wreck —

*Bors*

Hold, my lord, the king comes.

(*Enter King Arthur, Sir Mordred, Sir Gawain, Dagonet, and the court. Few are armed. Arthur sits. Mordred and his party take their place on the right of the throne.*)



*Arthur*

My lords, good morrow. The queen comes not yet?  
What justice is there to be rendered?  
For the king must needs judge timely and wisely though  
The man hath vitals tortured on the rack.

*Gawain*

My lord, here is a man whose fields are waste  
And grain downtrodden by your last assay  
Of hunting.

*Arthur*

Enough, enough, you shall be paid. Sir Kay,  
Look to it.

*Kay*

Aye, my lord, pay, pay, we are always paying.  
(*Enter Cador and Breuse, drunk.*)

*Arthur*

'Tis out of form and reverence that ye come  
Thus here, muddled with wine.

*Cador*

'Tis out of form and reverence what we have  
To tell the king. 'Tis somewhat for thy ears.

*Arthur*

Speak, then.

*Cador*

Last night before the feast, in a dark place —  
Some say the dark is devilled — before the cups  
At the feast, I heard two speak together.

*Arthur*

What said they, good fellow?

*Cador*

Thou heardst it, Breuse, what was't? I cannot think.  
My lord, I wake not early thus all days.

*Breuse*

I cannot think. Sure the place was dark,  
And they spake ill.

*Arthur*

Spake ill?

*Breuse*

One was a kinsman of the king.

*Arthur*

Kinsman?

*Cador*

High-voiced and hot.

*Arthur*

Who? Cudgel thy brains, who?

*Breuse*

Who, sweet friend?

*Cador*

Speak, thou leanest heavily! Leave rocking,  
Thou art not the ship of state.

*Breuse*

'Tis thou, thou weight. Speak!

*Arthur*

Take these two hence, Gawain. Kinsmen? Spake  
ill?

*Mordred*

'Tis naught, my lord. It is a drunken fancy  
Now I do think me, Dagonet did sing  
A ballad of King Mark's black treachery  
Against Tristram his kinsman. This same tale  
Is but the coinage of their drunken ears  
From the same song.

*Arthur*

Treachery — did they say treachery?

*Mordred*

Spake ill, no treachery.

*Arthur*

Didst thou sing so, boy?

*Dagonet*

Not I, my lord.

*Mordred*

'Twas then another.

*Arthur*

Very like, 'tis naught. Let us begin again.

*Gawain*

Here is a woman, lord, whose husband scorns  
And beats her like a dog.

*Woman*

My lord, King Arthur, by your leave. I loved  
This man with a mad, woman's love, and he —  
My lord, he loved me. But he spurns me now,  
And flouts me in my face. He hath struck me  
And I bore with that, cursed me and I took that,  
But he hath wronged me, and I will —

*Arthur*

Wronged thee? He hath wronged thee?

*Woman*

Yea, shamefully.

*Arthur*

Calm thee, calm thee, thou wretched broken wretch.  
Thou shalt have justice, there is much too much  
Of wrong done in the world.

*Woman*

Nay, I would not have him hurt, my lord.

*Kay*

Aye, that is the way of woman. Pardon me,  
My lord Arthur, I must speak — 'tis wisdom.  
Woman, if thou dost love a man, and fain  
Would keep his love, show not the excess of thy  
Affection and feed him well. Man is a brute  
To be held by the muzzle and not by the heart-  
chords.

*Arthur*

Ho, Sir Kay, thy words o'ershoot thee, man,  
Thou hast been seneschal so long that thou  
Dost think all things concerned with food.

*Kay*

If I am cynical of men, my lord,  
'Tis this.

*Arthur*

'Tis wherefore?

*Kay*

My lord, I have seen them eat.

*Gawain*

Here is another woman who hath wrongs

She cannot tell —

*Arthur*

So have we all, woman.

*Gawain*

She wears her wits awry.

*Kay*

'Tis no new ailment.

*Gawain*

My lord, she hath —

*Herald*

The queen, make way for the queen!

*Arthur*

Woman, thou shalt return.

*(Enter Guenevere. A noise of cries and wailing comes from the outer courts. Guenevere takes her stand at the left of the throne. Launcelot comes nearer to the front.)*

*Arthur*

Madam, there are charges here to-day  
Imperilling thy life and Launcelot's honour.  
What noise dins in the court?

*Gawain*

My lord, it is the people making dole,  
And wailing lest the queen be burned.

*Arthur*

Lay it, such clamour is unseemly.

*Launcelot*

My lord, let me speak.

*Arthur*

Ah, Sir Launcelot, Sir Launcelot,  
Thee have I loved in gone days passing well,  
And now thou hast cast sorrow over me.  
Once I mind me, 'fore mine eyes were weary

Feeding on their dear faces, thou didst take  
My knights on the Quest of the Holy Grail, and  
ne'er

That goodly company met whole again.  
But now thou hast done worse and ta'en away  
More than my Round Table. And thou hast edged  
Treachery 'twixt me and thee.

*Launcelot*

Hear me, my lord.

*Cries*

Hear him, hear him! Hear him not! Sir Launcelot!

*Gawain*

My lord, go slow. To lose a noble friend  
Is like a loss of the dear life, is such  
A loss; for a man's friends are his life.  
Go slow, a day may show the evil, but  
The time is longer that makes manifest  
The good.

*Arthur*

Doth baneful Fate will thus that we must see  
To understand, be blind to act? Oh, would  
That I were blind in this. For well I know  
That now indeed is my whole kingdom mischieved.  
(*Cries without.*)

There will be war, Sir Launcelot, now, 'twixt me  
And thee, thy blood and my blood, cruel strife,  
Tearing the vitals of this realm. Mine arm  
Is powerless for seeing what will fall.  
Madam, I rejoice to see thee weep,  
'Twere best wept sooner when there was some boot—

*Launcelot*

Then I will out, willy, nilly. King Arthur,  
I own the debt I owe to thee, for thou  
Didst give me knighthood, and of thee  
Have I had honour and much worship. Yet  
In all thy quarrels have I lent what aid  
I might in thy behalf, shoulder and heart

Have been thine, buckler and helm and sword,  
 Vassal and steed, been thine. Nor have I cast  
 Green eyes of envy on thy station, nor  
 Champed a restive bit, hearing thy fame  
 Exalted, as have some nearer of kin  
 To thee, I name them not.

*Arthur*

Why do ye glare on my nephew Mordred?  
 But 'tis naught.

*Launcelot*

But I did add  
 Ever what inches I might unto thy stature.  
 In all thy heat thou canst not yet forget  
 How many a venture have we had together  
 Of joy or woe. Therefore, my lord, for this  
 Old brotherhood, I pray thee think on me,  
 And judge not rashly.

*Arthur*

Yea, truly must I think on thee, yea, truly,  
 Bitter or sweet, still must I think on thee.

*Launcelot*

Nay, think what thou wilt then, on my soul I care  
 Not. I cannot sit as thou and weigh  
 Vantage 'gainst vantage, and knit prudence up,  
 Search whether 't be good or bad or what,  
 Teach mine eyes to rob their sockets of flight,  
 And stop mine ears with silence. 'Tis fitter work  
 For hermits and white hairs, not men. I know  
 No honied speech nor do I value aught  
 The slippered dalliance of the favoured few,  
 But strike with this arm what harmeth me or them  
 I love. 'Tis many times I championed her  
 Whilst thou sat dreaming high emprise or plan  
 To win wide rumour for thy name. Thinkst thou,  
 God's life, I can no longer wield this sword?  
 'Tis blood for blood, hate for hate thou'lt have?  
 She is the queen, who then shall judge her?

*Arthur*

Stay, Sir Launcelot, thou art mad in thy heat.  
'Tis hot blood that hath cost thee dear ere this.

*Launcelot*

Thou knowst 'tis fellowship and humility  
That kept me thine, not lack of realm or power.  
Lands have I, kinsmen and followers,  
And all are hers whom through me ye would shame —  
Therefore show me him that dares accuse her.

*Arthur*

The clamour in the court increases.

*Gawain*

My lord, it cannot be stilled. Some there be  
That think the queen condemned to be burnt, and  
they

Bewail piteously her death. But some  
Deem she is cleared of blame, and they do growl  
And mutter underneath their breaths, and curse  
Loudly this tribunal.

*Arthur*

But how if she be pardoned here?

*(Noise in Sir Mordred's party to the right.)*

*Gawain*

My lord, to my eyes, judging as best I may,  
If she bide here there will be blood and strife,  
Whether she be burned or pardoned. Either  
Way is dangerous.

*Launcelot*

Nay, hear ye this, if she stay not as queen,  
She shall not stay at all.

*Bors*

Yea, think ye we will let the queen be burnt?

*Urre*

To arms for the queen!

*Arthur*

Silence!

*Cries*

To arms, to arms! For the king! For Mordred! For  
the queen!

*Arthur*

Mordred? what cause is that?

*Guenevere*

I pray you, Sir Knights —

*Cries*

The queen speaks! Let us hear the queen!

*Kay*

Stop your gabble, fools, and hear the queen!

*Voice*

She hath been overlong silent now.

*Arthur*

Silence, she is yet the queen!

*Cries*

The queen! the queen!

*Guenevere*

I will put off thy crown and robe before

I speak in trial.

*Arthur*

Speak. 'Tis well!

*Guenevere*

Lords and vassals of this island realm,  
Hear me speak. I will say briefly and  
Have done. My lords, I am a woman, whom  
The gods built bigger than their wonted mould,  
Wilder, more diverse, waging fiercer war  
And conflict 'twixt the good and evil. He  
That hath pinions larger than the common flight  
Must needs take greater pains lest they be sullied.  
My lord Arthur, I have ever loved  
Thee since I came from Cameliard,  
My father's land, loved thee as men love saints.  
Not with the petty pulsing of the veins,  
Nor jealousies nor heat of mad desire,  
But at the topmost of my soul's bent.



*Arthur*

Is that the love men ask of women — good men ?  
I know not.

*Guenevere*

Since thou'rt ideal, they that love thee love  
Thee as a mystic symbol, or a bodied  
Soul of some dear thing, not as frail man.  
Thou hast not known the low brown earth, nor it  
Known thee. So wast thou ever loved, and so  
Thou hast loved me, however much thou'st loved.  
For thou knowst well, my lord, this is no husband's  
Nor no lover's jealousy that moves  
Thee in this sifting trial thus, but is  
The jealous eye the king bends on the crystal  
Perfectness of his long-dreamed-of court.  
Thy kingdom is thy spouse, my lord, not I.  
I fear I speak o'erboldly.

*Arthur*

Nay, 'tis no matter. Speak.

*Guenevere*

Then, ah, then —

*Arthur*

Well, well, then — ?

*Guenevere*

I have loved Sir Launcelot too. All the pomp  
And glory of this world, of sights and sound,  
Of summer air and downs of May, of stars  
And white dawn leaping over dewy fields,  
Of life and love and the little moods men know,  
And bossèd arms, and chivalry, and jousts,  
Of blood and wild, unquenchable revenge,  
Of bowers drunk with music and sweet sound,  
All this my woman's heart hath found to love  
In him, Sir Launcelot. So have I loved  
You both, but differently. Methinks that God  
Hath placed in me such high, opposing tides  
That if my soul be shipwrecked he could blame

Me not.

*Arthur*

Madam, me seemeth 'twas all love with you.  
Were there not other things stirring at court?

*Guenevere*

The diverse uses of the world make men  
Take love only as a part of the whole  
Existence, but women — as a jewel liveth  
By the light, so live women by love.

*Arthur*

Haply. And now?

*Guenevere*

Now — I speak not for the din.

*Arthur*

What if ye be our queen no longer?

*Launcelot*

Go with me, thou shalt go with me, my lady!

*Arthur*

Queen no more!

*Cries*

With Launcelot! Queen no more! With Launcelot!

*Guenevere*

Nay, nay, not Launcelot, let that have done.  
Steal thou my crown, I go not hence with him  
To Joyous Garde, to be his love. Nay, nay.  
I will not so. Sure life turneth bitter  
In the cup, and I must dash it from me.

*Arthur*

Where wilt thou turn if thou art queen no longer?

*Guenevere*

If he rescue me hence, know ye 'twill be  
To the sisters by Boscastle. There shall I  
Be buried from this world, and let my soul  
Crowd with its persons my life's stage. But if  
I bide here —

*Cries*

Thou'lt burn! Treason! (*Confusion.*)

*Guenevere*

Aye, leave your howling, poor lean curs,  
Fattened with this man's collops. Ah! Sir Mordred,  
Why hast thou been so keen to fill black sails?  
Art thou the giant Jubaunce or Goliath?  
For I know well who set these on —

*Mordred*

Madam, I pray thee, I am all for peace.

*Guenevere*

Yea, very like, — my lord Arthur, look —  
Thy dove of peace hath need of armour plate  
Beneath his quills.

*(She tears off Mordred's cloak. He stands in his breast-plate.)*

Ah, cowards have ever need of steel. I leave  
Thee now to them, kind leeches, they will suck  
Thy veins dry to a drop. But who am I  
That speak? *(She starts out.)*

*Arthur*

Nay, madam, nay, God's life, nay, dost think —?  
Stay, thy cause must still be tried.

*Guenevere*

Queen no more. Aye, I have had my hour.  
This hour my life hath spoken in full tone.  
No more I strive in the world, for I am ashamed  
Enough of men already. May I not  
Go hence? I am all undone methinks.

*Launcelot*

'Tis I speak for her. Sir, what man shall judge her?  
My lord kinsmen, close round.

*(The kinsmen surround the queen. Exeunt. Mordred  
and his party follow. The crowd vanishes. Sir  
Gawain and King Arthur remain.)*

*Arthur*

'Tis blood for wrong. Take sword and follow me.

*Gawain*

But first have brought thine arms, my lord, 'twere folly

Else to venture.

*Arthur*

Nay, God forearmed me in this matter.

*Gawain*

Give over theories —

*Arthur*

Hold me not, or I may do thee hurt.

Come, come, let the horn blow.

*(The commotion without lessens. Enter knight.)*

*Knight*

My lord, they have buffeted their way

Through the outer gate, and they are gone by horse

Toward Boscastle. The people cheer for joy

At their escape. Let make pursuit? Or not?

*(A bell rings. Enter Sir Kay.)*

*Kay*

My lord, Mordred hath seized the south tower, and is

In open rebellion.

*Arthur*

Oh, traitors all! Oh, traitor roof that falls

Not on this day. *(Flings off his crown.)* Into the dust,  
thou ring

Of wretchedness! To arms! To arms!

*(A crowd pours into the room. Confusion. All the bells  
of the castle are clanging.)*

*Cries*

To arms! To arms! To arms! *(Without.)* Mordred  
for king! Mordred for king!

To arms!

## ACT IV

*Reception-hall of the convent on the cliffs near Boscastle.*

*To the left, at the back, a flight of seven steps leads to the  
cloister corridor, beyond which is the garden with a wall  
and trees at the end. On the left, near the front, is a  
prie-dieu with flowers and lighted candles. At the*

*back of the room a kind of Roman seat, long, with a low back and armpieces. Benches on the right. Outside in the garden it is early dawn, and beyond the trees shines the golden sky. Save for the sound of the surge below, there is a great stillness over the world. Two novices enter, and light new candles on the prie-dieu.*

*Enter SAINT MORWENA, the abbess, and with her GUENEVERE in white dress and veil. On her breast she wears the emblem of the Sacred Heart.*

*Morwena*

Hast thou found peace, my daughter?

*Guenevere*

Yea, mother, as doth the moon, whose burnt-out sphere  
Keeps one face turned to sunward, so  
The dead globe of my life hath one side lit,  
The other dark. I am pale grown and weak,  
And my poor body hath forgot its splendour.

*Morwena*

There is another splendour in whose light  
All flesh is grass.

*Guenevere*

Now my soul calls to me with a hundred  
Tongues, the heralds of my spirit.

*Morwena*

Evil is no thing within itself,  
But is a lacking of the vital good.  
And of thy life what man is there shall judge  
Save our sweet father, Christ?

*Guenevere*

Gentle brother Christ, father and brother.  
'Tis like to something lived in sleep thou stirrest.

*Morwena*

Life is a restless sleep.

*Guenevere*

The dreaming king forgot me, and another  
Loved me, and I loved him. That was my right  
To live. Think you I should have starved the life

I had for some uncertain good to come?

*Morwena*

Belike that were not all of life, this love.  
God gave man love to lead him out of self,  
And upward —

*Guenevere*

Man's self and God, I know not where they meet,  
Nor where they part.

*Morwena*

To lead us out of self and upward.  
For all things do but school us to God's end.

*Guenevere*

Very like. Writ round the cell of our narrow lives  
Are runes we cannot read. Our days are but  
A footbridge 'tween two worlds — nay, I do speak  
By rote, knowing naught. My brain doth lose the thread.  
Once at the sacrament methought I saw  
A figure in the likeness of a child,  
And lo! his face shined bright as any fire,  
And smote itself into the blessed bread.  
I never had a child whose little hands  
Had drawn me from the tawdry passing world  
Into the mother's holy chamber. Nay —  
'Twas only empty hours and cold hearth,  
And young love beating at the door without.  
Woe to the woman whose happiest days do come  
To be the days she most laments.

*Morwena*

Thou hast thought much within these quiet walls,  
Meditation is fair Solitude's  
True sister.

*Guenevere*

Yea, thought much, and well, well have I paid  
For the worldly draught my cup hath brimmed. And yet  
Meseems that there are others that pay less  
And sin far more. Some there be that sin  
Vilely and often, and then forget it straight —

*Morwena*

Him that forgotteth God hath forgotten.

*Guenevere*

And the world forgets likewise and blameth not.

*Morwena*

Yea, they be fools that live their lives, and do  
Perceive the truth as little as do spoons  
Perceive the taste of broth. Their clouds and thine  
Have different heights.

*Guenevere*

And some torture themselves for every little  
Wrong, pondering their deeds, and the world  
Curseth them —

*Morwena*

Yet they are blest, for they do meditate,  
And he that thinketh truly cannot die,  
But the thoughtless are as dead already.  
He that is wise doth choose the thoughtful life  
As a clever woman findeth the right colour.  
Long is the night to him that cannot sleep,  
Long is the journey to the weary man,  
And long is the span of life to the foolish. Take  
Some quiet hour at sundown in some peaceful  
Place, and look about the vineyard  
Of thy soul. The moon is silver clear by night,  
The water glimmers in the sun, but be  
Thou shining in thy meditation.

*Guenevere*

For some that is an easy thing, but not  
For all.

*Morwena*

Aye, passion breaks through unreflecting minds  
As rain through ill-thatched houses, so the sage  
Hath written. Oh, what a fool is man that sets  
His lips unto the brimming cup of passion.  
It is a galling drink that kindles thirst,  
And sates but with exhaustion. But thine

Is drained. Daughter, thou dost well to pray  
 And keep thy vigils, for to-morrow is  
 The day thou tak'st thy vows, is't not?  
 Then thou mayst wear the garb of peace always.

*Guenevere*

Yea, mother, take the vow relinquishing  
 All the vain idols of the world, to purge  
 My flesh of earthly desire, and strip my soul  
 Naked before God

*Morwena*

Bless thee, my daughter, I rejoice that thou  
 Art ready.

*Guenevere*

Ready —!

*Morwena*

Why dost thou stare and round thine eyes so, seeing  
 Naught?

*Guenevere*

Mother, I do fear I know not what  
 That yet may fall. Last night I had a dream.  
 And in it I did see a tournament  
 Of ladies fair and noble knights,  
 Whose spear-heads flickered when they moved like flames.  
 Then at the hurtling that did follow there,  
 All my wild blood boiled, and the strong, sweet taint  
 Of the world came back into my veins. How do  
 I know but having given up my worldly drink  
 I yet be ta'en athirst for Camelot and glory?

*Morwena*

Jesu defend me!

*Guenevere*

Then were I lost indeed, O God, if I  
 Do leave off woman and turn saint, give up  
 The world and cannot keep my heaven. Be neither  
 Spiritual nor fleshly, saint nor queen.

*Morwena*

Thou beatst too high, these words are wild. Let God



Choose for thee, daughter. Our hearts are frail  
 Barks for rough seas. Let God choose for thee.  
*(The matin bell rings, the light of full day is in the garden.)*

*Morwena*

The matin bell. Go thou, child, peace be with thee.  
*(In the cloister corridor the sisters are passing. Guenevere looks at them till they are past, then follows after. The abbess stands before the prie-dieu and crosses herself. Enter Sister Agatha.)*

*Agatha*

Mother, I cannot pray for watching her face.  
 Her soul doth seem to feed upon itself.

*Morwena*

How, child?

*Agatha*

The queen — there seems a clashing of two spheres  
 Within her frame. Last night I heard — thou knowst  
 Her cell is next to mine — last night the queen  
 Did clatter in her sleep, and clapped her hands  
 And cried out: "Ho, well struck! Avoid thy horse!"  
 And other speeches from the lists. Strange peace  
 For one that goes to take her vows so soon.

*Morwena*

She hath already told me of this dream.  
 What song is that?

*Agatha*

'Tis Dagonet, the queen's page. The lad  
 Is thoughtless to sing thus within these walls.

*Dagonet (at the gate)*

Look out, my lady fair, and see  
 The lustre of the night,  
 The moon beneath her canopy  
 Sails beauteous and bright —

*(Enter Dagonet.)*

Madam, there is a knight at the gate, I hear  
 His horse's panting — I saw him near.  
 Haply it is King Arthur come to see

My lady — ah, if it were ! — and behind, there  
Southward on Tintagel Road, a cloud  
Of dust like men-at-arms galloping. Haply  
I may hold his bridle while he stays.

*Agatha*

The king ?

*Morwena*

King Arthur ?

*Agatha (going to the corridor)*

'Tis he. Madam, I will leave you. (*Exit.*)

(*Enter King Arthur.*)

*Arthur*

God keep thee, madam. The queen — ?

*Morwena*

God keep thee, my lord. My lord, I am an old  
Woman, and I speak my thoughts. I fear thy coming  
Is but poorly placed. To-morrow the queen  
Doth give her vows, leaving forever all  
The transitory uses of this world —

*Arthur*

Ere this, ere this, I had come had not the brawls  
That broke out on the trial day kept all  
The realm bestead. Sir Launcelot's falseness is  
Forgot in larger woes.

*Morwena*

Where is Sir Launcelot ?

*Arthur*

Gone to his lands in Fraunce.

*Morwena*

And thou ?

*Arthur*

My mantle clingeth heavier than mail.  
Now am I like a father whose one son,  
The sole issue of his loins, is slain. At morn  
He minds him of his son's going, and at eve  
His coming. Seeth his heir's house wasted,  
The chamber of the winds, where harp sounds not,

Nor any joy within the court as once.  
Wherefore am I come to bid farewell  
To her that shortly goes to take her leave  
Of life. Once was she queen, and well I know  
Of her and me that each shall not see other  
More with fleshly eyes.

*Morwena*

I fear me lest the sight of thee will rouse  
The red tide of her blood and kindle heats  
To her soul's detriment. She cometh now.  
Show her all reverence, my lord.  
(*Exit the abbess. Enter Guenevere from the right.*)

*Guenevere*

My lord.

*Arthur*

How dost thou, my lady — and queen?

*Guenevere*

My lord, I have turned from the world's eyes that  
Were bent so long hotly upon me. And thou?

*Arthur*

I — I, but 'tis no matter. I am come to say  
Farewell.

*Guenevere*

Farewell?

*Arthur*

And pity have I more for thee, indeed  
Since I have suffered, suffered humanwise.  
And yet I do not blame, thou didst no more  
Than I to bring the false dome down — no more.  
Together we wrought havoc, thou with thy love  
Loosing bonds not to be loosed, and I  
Seeing men not as men but as symbols vague.  
Star-gazing I did lose the earthly road,  
And visionary flashes blinded me  
That I knew not the common lives.

*Guenevere*

Such blindness doth tempt men as dark doth thieves.

*Arthur*

The man blindly good is good to himself  
Alone — to others he is evil.  
And dreamers should be dreamers for themselves  
Alone — for plain men facts! And thou?

*Guenevere*

What boots it us to weigh one 'gainst the other?  
I have fought the rich life-passion from my heart,  
Pray God I turn not back to it.

*Arthur*

Yea, cleave to this quiet thou hast found,  
Hug silence to thee, lest thou shouldst feel perchance  
All the deep wrongs that men can do. Feigned love  
That covers deep designs, ingratitude  
And thankless greed, kinsmen at war,  
Murder, rapine, blood, despair, and hate,  
Trusts betrayed, and confidence despised,  
I have felt them all — all. Truly  
I have known the low brown earth, have bit the dirt.  
Ah, madam, pray to God to leave thee here  
Till Death shatters the flower of thy life.  
(*There is the sound of horsemen without, and the noise  
of arms.*)

*Guenevere*

What clangour is that?

*Arthur*

'Tis my horsemen, I did ride ahead of them  
Some space.

*Guenevere*

Yea, my lord Arthur, all of life is not  
This baseness that thou tellst me of. Are these  
Then enemies of thine — nay, my lord, they follow thee  
Far as the land lasts to the sea. I know  
There be sweet human things in life for men;  
The handclasp of old friends, and friends to share  
Sadness and joy, old voices and old sounds,  
Sunlight, and walled gardens, and wild moors,

Eye that readeth eye, and heart, heart —  
Ah, my lord, there is more sweet than gall —

*Arthur*

Tell me not —

*Guenevere*

Or gladly we take the gall as well as sweetness,  
For whether be the sunlight fierce or mild,  
What man but fain would watch the shadow grow  
And on the dial of his life mark time,  
Rather than darkness and unhoured ways.

*(Dagonet sings without.)*

Ah, there is Dagonet singing a lay  
Unto thy knights. It is an old song that,  
And tells how Joseph of Arimithy came  
Into this land. I have heard it oft at court,  
At Pentecost, my lord, dost thou remember?

*Arthur*

Nay, I know not, madam, that time is gone.  
And now farewell, I may not tarry, fare  
Thee well. I know of thee and me that each  
Shall not see other ever more with fleshly eye.  
And now I must needs hasten and depart  
Back to Camelot and the court and strife.  
But afterward shall sail to Avalon,  
And change my life from this world.

*(From the chapel come the voices of the nuns singing  
matins.)*

*Guenevere*

Not meet again?

*Arthur*

No mortal meeting.

*Guenevere*

Alas!

*Arthur*

Nay, madam, nay, haply thou mayest  
Be queen, when all the goodly knights I lost  
In diverse quests and ventures will awake

From their long sleep, and form in heaven again  
 The King's Round Table, perfect at last, and there  
 With shining arms will joust in Christ's fair courts  
 For diamonds like suns and carcanets  
 Of little stars.

*Guenevere*

Ah, God, all the gall of the world takes not  
 The dreamer from his dreaming! Thou speakst fair,  
 But slowly, slowly through the air of time  
 The drops of life fall on eternity.

*Arthur*

Yea, they pass slowly, perhaps no man  
 Can count them, yet they pass. And when thou hast  
 Set down thy staff and book, and they have laid  
 Thee in cold sepulchre, thou shalt not stir  
 To note the passing years, nor count the moons,  
 For drums or tramlings or the utmost heat  
 And noise of human conflict cannot break  
 The mood and spirit of the dead.

*Guenevere*

My lord, tarry!

*(Horns and bugles sound outside.)*

*Arthur*

Lo! I leave in thee the fairest part  
 Of all my fair, sad past. Yet —

*Guenevere*

Tarry

*Arthur*

I know not yet what orisons ye pray,  
 But beg thee 'member me, and if thou seest  
 Me nevermore again, pray for my soul.  
 Farewell. *(He goes.)*

*Guenevere*

My lord, my lord Arthur, do not leave me!  
*(He looks back once and is gone.)*

I love thee too, thou wilt not leave me!  
 Take me with thee to Camelot and the court.

*(She runs out after King Arthur.)*

Arthur! Arthur!

*(The chant in the chapel leaves off, and now the frightened sisters rush into the room. Sister Agatha stands at the head of the stairs. Enter the abbess. Outside there is a clatter of horses departing.)*

*Agatha*

Mother!

*Morwena*

Yea, the queen hath a wild mood.

*Agatha*

O God, O God, King Arthur hath ridden away,  
And she weeps after him like mad. There, there!  
She hath torn off her veil, the other hand  
Hath rent the emblem from her breast, snatched out  
The Sacred Heart.

*Sisters*

Alas! Oh!

*(Enter Guenevere. She drags her veil in her left hand. with her right she has torn off the Sacred Heart.)*

*Guenevere*

Oh, I am lost! Curse me, mother, curse  
You sisters, and let me die!

*Morwena*

Nay, daughter —

*Guenevere*

Nay, thou shalt not touch me. I am she,  
That woman that gave up the world's lusts  
For her spirit's health. And now I have trampled down  
That shrine!

*Morwena*

Leave us, you sisters. My daughter, let God choose —

*Guenevere*

I have lost both kingdoms, O God, and now my soul  
Is shipwrecked. Jesu, have mercy! Mother of God,  
Be merciful!

*(She falls toward the prie-dieu.)*

## ACT V

*A year later. Same room in the convent of Boscastle. It is near dusk, but the afterglow lingers, and the garden and cloisters are filled with red light. Guenevere lies asleep on the Roman bench. The abbess and Sister Agatha attend her. On the right sit three nuns. Dagouet hovers about the room. Sir Launcelot talks with the abbess.*

*Morwena*

'Tis nigh four seasons gone since thou hast seen  
Her. A little and thou'st been too late.  
She tarryeth not much longer in this world.

*Launcelot*

How she lies faded, poor lady, like a rose  
When the rough wind sucks the freshness from its  
heart.

*Morwena*

That day my lord Arthur came and went,  
That was the zenith of her spirit's star,  
That day after vigils and hard fasts her blood  
Burst bond and cried for Camelot and glory.  
Then flesh fought spirit. Hardly she won, but lies  
Here broken with the struggle as thou seest.  
I know not if this may be well or no  
To tear the heart-roots of your being out,  
Seeking to be other than God made you.

*Launcelot*

Would God had either made us as we yearn  
To be, or else had made us what we are  
Without the yearning!

*Morwena*

She will soon waken, wait. Thou sayst, my lord,  
King Arthur is slain, she hath had word of it.  
What of Mordred, that vile traitor chaff  
That maketh foul the wind?



*Launcelot*

Ah, madam, he is snatched from his base dealing  
Here, he too is slain, and Camelot  
Is but a den of plots and arms. Despair  
Shadows the hearts of good men. Alas,  
The glory of the realm of Logris  
Is departed.

*Dagonet*

All day have horses' feet clicked by — 'tis knights  
That ride to court.

*Launcelot*

Yea, boy, there be jousts and feastings there.  
(*A distant bell sounds.*)

*Agatha*

Saint Necton's tide-bell, 'tis later than  
I deemed.

*Morwena*

See how strangely the sun's red lingers yet,  
As if 'twere loth to yield the free, hot course  
To the subtle-working, grey night. Likewise  
Meseems our lady the queen still doth glow  
After her life's hot span, and her veins pulse  
With the rich past. How faint and tender the bell!  
O Death, how subtle art thou in thy coming,  
But afterward long night and haply stars.

*Agatha*

Rather say that like the moon she burned  
In beauty all the night of sin, and then  
Did fade in the new day.

*Morwena*

Peace, Sir Launcelot! Sure I am grown foolish  
'Thinking on her, poor lady.

*Launcelot*

Nay, likewise all my thoughts have been on her.  
Whether in joyless wood or when  
The thin prow scudded o'er the midnight swell,  
Or Breton thatches waited in the harbour,

In every land my memory sought her.

*Dagonet*

And I. 'Tis many songs I read of late  
In this lone house, of ladies beautiful  
That suffered and are dead. And always when  
I read I thought of her, and said she too,  
She shall be beautiful in rhyme till the world's  
End.

*Launcelot*

Aye, and her name into men's thoughts shall bring  
The peerless ventures and sweet courtesy  
Of this the summer of all time. For still  
Her soul is as her station sovran, and when  
The wild sowing of man shall be gleaned and the world  
be garnered

She shall be queen at fairer courts than these —

*Morwena*

Nay, nay, my lord, let not thy heart o'ersweep thee.  
Daughter, thou spakest thoughtlessly, thou art  
Yet young and thy young piety is hard.  
Is there a moon, was't yesternight? This old  
Head is so racked with care I mind me not.

*Agatha*

I know not either.

*Dagonet*

Yea, mother, 'tis but one night to the full.  
Look! The sky stirs now faintly with light.

*Morwena*

Hush, she wakes. Sir Launcelot, go thou  
Walk in the cloister. We will prepare  
Her for thy coming when 'tis well.

*Launcelot*

Pray you be not o'erlong — I know not how much  
Of this frail life she have.

(Exit Sir Launcelot.)

*Guenevere (waking)*

Ah, 'tis dusk! Even at this time it was

That in my sleep I dreamed of Camelot.

*Morwena*

Camelot, my daughter?

*Guenevere*

But yet somehow it was a brighter place  
And newer city. The sun sank and the slim  
Moon lifted her pale beauty into heaven,  
And dome and turret glittered in the light.  
Then Mary the Mother of God came and took  
My hand, and her voice fell sweet upon my weary  
Ear —

*Morwena*

Speak to her, boy.

*Dagonet*

Alas, I may not for looking on her face!  
Hark, there is the nightingale, my lady, Look!  
Too — the moon riseth!

*Guenevere*

The moon —

*Dagonet*

The moon like a white flame in the trees, like liquid  
Silver in among the leaves. Mother,  
I cannot speak! Oh, my lady! The moon!

*Guenevere*

Distantly rose Camelot out  
Of the silver plain.

*Dagonet*

And the nightingales —

*Guenevere*

Aye, all the nightingales in Cameliard  
Cannot sing my woes, nor every bird  
That sings his tragic plaints of passionate  
Mischance can wail my sorrows.

*Morwena*

Nay, madam, sit, thou hast not strength to stand.

*Guenevere*

I was a woman and I needed love,

I was a queen to long for courts about,  
 Strong lords and ladies and gay raiment.  
 I am a weary human thing that needeth  
 Rest. Rest is the thing we most do hunger  
 For and know it not. Sleep, sleep, it is  
 But the gateway of pure rest's abode. Nay, let  
 Me have sleep's sister, black-garbed death. For  
                   queens

Like other women have strong need of death  
 At times — oh, I am childish grown —

*Morwena*

Madam, my daughter —

*Guenevere*

Whose spurs clink walking in the cloister there?

*Morwena*

One come to see thee and to say farewell.

*Guenevere*

Farewell, 'tis always farewell in this world.

Is it Sir Launcelot?

*Morwena*

Yea, daughter, he.

*Guenevere*

Let him enter.

*(Enter Launcelot.)*

How dost, Sir Launcelot? Art well? Whence comest?

*Launcelot*

From Fraunce, my lady. And thou?

*Guenevere*

Thou seest I have found peace.

In Fraunce this twelvemonth gone?

*Launcelot*

When the sly Mordred bore an open front,  
 With vassals and kinsmen I had saved the king.  
 But he would have it not. And I distraught  
 Got me to my father's land again.

*Guenevere*

And now?

*Launcelot*

Now having word of the king's death, I knew  
The ravage and the spoil within this isle,  
And hasted into boats and blew three days,  
And drove into this tortured little harbour,  
That thou mightst leave thy sorrows here and go  
With me —

*Morwena*

With thee?

*Guenevere*

Thee?

*Launcelot*

The many-towered castle on the heights,  
Below, a little Breton hill with trees  
And slow white sheep, and farther west the grey  
Rocks smoking in the sun at ebb-tide, heather  
And pasture-bell upon the seawind mingling —

*Guenevere*

My lord, thou knowst through thee and me is this  
Whole kingdom sore bestead, and the sails of the realm  
Veered from the old lodestar of purity.  
The Round Table is broke and many knights  
Tasted the dolours of death through me and thee.  
Therefore I pray thee now, Sir Launcelot,  
Look thou not on me evermore. And well  
As I have loved thee, I may not see thee  
Again, for now mine eye it turneth not  
To the worldward but to God, for my soul's health  
Lest I be damned.

*Dagonet*

My lady, there be worse than thou now saints  
In heaven.

*Guenevere*

Thou art o'erfond, child. Then, Sir Launcelot,  
Much as I have loved thee, for Christ's sake I may  
Not see thee. Therefore I pray that thou  
Depart; and pray for me —

*Launcelot*

I have come far to see thee, but I will  
Not trouble thee, poor lady, with fond words.  
Sithence thou'lt have it so, I go, yet I  
Sail never on the sea to Fraunce again  
But to a hermitage, and make my prayers  
For thy soul's rest and mine. I pray thee then,  
Before I go, madam, kiss me once  
And nevermore.

*Guenevere*

Nay, that may I never do —

*Launcelot*

Farewell.

*Guenevere*

And for our old love's sake, Sir Launcelot,  
Do this; when I am dead, come thou with seven  
Knights, and carry me to Glastonbury  
Where my lord Arthur lieth. Pray God I have  
Not power to see thee with my worldly eyes  
Again for my soul's sake.  
(*He starts to go out.*)

*Morwena*

She hath o'erspent her strength.

*Dagonet*

She sleeps.

*Morwena*

I know not if she wake again. Thou needst  
Not go, Sir Launcelot.

*Morwena*

Weep not, my daughters, she hath fallen asleep  
Gloriously.

*Agatha*

Yea, madam, Christ's mother hath ta'en her hand<sup>3</sup> again.

*Dagonet (falling on his knees)*

Dead! Oh, my lady!

*Launcelot*

Nay, she doth sleep. Dead? Art thou gone?

Gone when thou art all mine at last tho late!  
 Nay, God's life, madam, she is not dead, or why  
 Drives the blood yet here in my heart! Thou'lt  
     wake?

Nay, dead, oh, dead — then all is dead  
 Forevermore!

*Morwena*

My lord —

*Launcelot*

Oh, then a long good night to you, my lady!

Good night.

*(There comes the sound of knights clattering by and singing a catch.)*

What ho, heigho, with bridle and spur!

Heigho, and away we ride,

For men do love, heigho, do love! --

*Morwena*

Who sings?

*Agatha*

'Tis knights returned from Camelot and the feasts,

The new king, Constantine, is crowned.

## SCENE II

*A wood near Glastonbury. The wood is dark and, save for a rustle of the leafage now and then, silent. Presently there comes a light through the trees, which brightens and brightens. The tramp of footsteps is heard growing gradually louder. Sir Launcelot and his seven knights enter with the queen's bier on their shoulders, and eight torches burning about her. Her head rests on a cushion, and on her breast is her crown. A pall of black samite bordered with gold lilies covers her body. The knights turn in behind a rocky mound, then reappear among the trees. Then as they go, every*

*now and then, their torches flash further and further away, smaller and smaller points of light amid the columns of the wood, till the last twinkle is gone and the blackness returns.*

CURTAIN













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